



# ZERO BEAT

## NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

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## Hams helping humans in hot water

*By LD Steiner/W0XLD*

A ham out prowling the forest roads in the mountains north of Vail saw a pickup slide off the dirt road and down a steep embankment, and was scared for the truck's occupants if the truck rolled down the mountain. Fortunately, the driver and passenger in the truck were able to exit the vehicle safely, but they nor the ham who saw them had cell signal to call for help. So, with his pulse pounding from the near-disaster, the amateur radio operator keyed up and said "mayday" three times.

It was a sunny Sunday in September in the Springs, and I had a radio switched on while I was taking care of some household chores. There wasn't much activity on the local repeaters or the common simplex frequencies, so when I heard that "mayday," it caught my full attention. As a trained monitor for the Colorado Emergency Reporting Network (CERN), I knew what information to gather and how to get ahold of the county emergency dispatchers no matter where in Colorado the distress call came from. The Colorado Connection linked repeater system brought the call for help from deep in the mountains to my in-town ham shack, and I was able to get the 911 dispatcher for Eagle County on the phone quickly. I passed on the message that there were no injuries, but that the truck was in a precarious position and at risk of rolling, and the driver was requesting assistance from

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### Hams helping humans, cont.

law enforcement or other emergency responders to figure out how to extract the vehicle without losing it or destroying it completely.

Even the repeater coverage was sketchy at the site of the accident, but the amateur operator knew his phonetic alphabet well. He switched to his best antenna, repeated himself slowly, loudly, and clearly several times, and gave me exactly the information we needed to get a forest ranger or sheriff's deputy on site quickly.

This story ended well, thanks to a few skills we had practiced in advance:



1. The ham knew the repeater frequencies for the Colorado Connection repeaters that covered the area he was exploring. He knew that CERN monitors take shifts monitoring in case anyone needs a relay to call 911.

2. The ham knew how to get latitude and longitude from his smartphone, even when there was no cell coverage. Most cell phones can do this, but you may need an app that works offline to report these coordinates in decimal format. It's good to know how to do this before one wanders out of cell phone coverage range. The dispatcher I talked to was grateful that the ham could provide this information quickly and accurately, as I relayed communications between them. It also made it very easy for the dispatcher to direct the first responder with pinpoint accuracy.

3. I had information about how to reach Eagle County's dispatcher among my references I use during a CERN monitor shift, and had used them previously relaying other calls in the past.

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### Hams helping humans, cont.

If you would like information about the Colorado Connection's linked repeaters and their coverage areas, see <https://colcon.org> . If you would like to learn more about the Colorado Emergency Reporting Net, to benefit from their training and to help monitor the statewide repeaters to answer calls for help, see <https://co-cern.org> .

Later that evening, during the Colorado section traffic net, a Colorado family sent a "radiogram" to their loved ones in North Carolina who had been cut off by the damage to infrastructure after Hurricane Helene. These radiograms can carry simple text messages asking for assistance or reporting on conditions, but the ARRL also provides a predefined list of messages that can be used to keep such radiograms short and their transmission quick, including health-and-welfare check requests.

So the Colorado Traffic League relayed the health-and-welfare check request through the National Traffic System to North Carolina, where volunteers were busy completing the last-mile hop to households affected by the hurricane. Sometimes radiograms were even delivered by hand, written on paper, exactly like telegrams in the early 20th century... because that method works, even when cell towers and fiber infrastructure have been destroyed.

A lesson learned from the hurricane response is that amateur radio operators are most effective at connecting disaster-struck areas with aid and with caring families when they are in practice, thanks to regular exercise of traffic-handling skills through the National Traffic System. Any operators seeking to gain this experience and stay in practice are invited to listen and check in to the Colorado Traffic League/K0NTS Colorado section net at 1900 every day, also on the Colorado Connection linked repeater system. See <https://k0nts.org> for details. We can take pride in passing radiograms efficiently and effectively: after all, "relaying" such traffic is the ARRL's middle name!



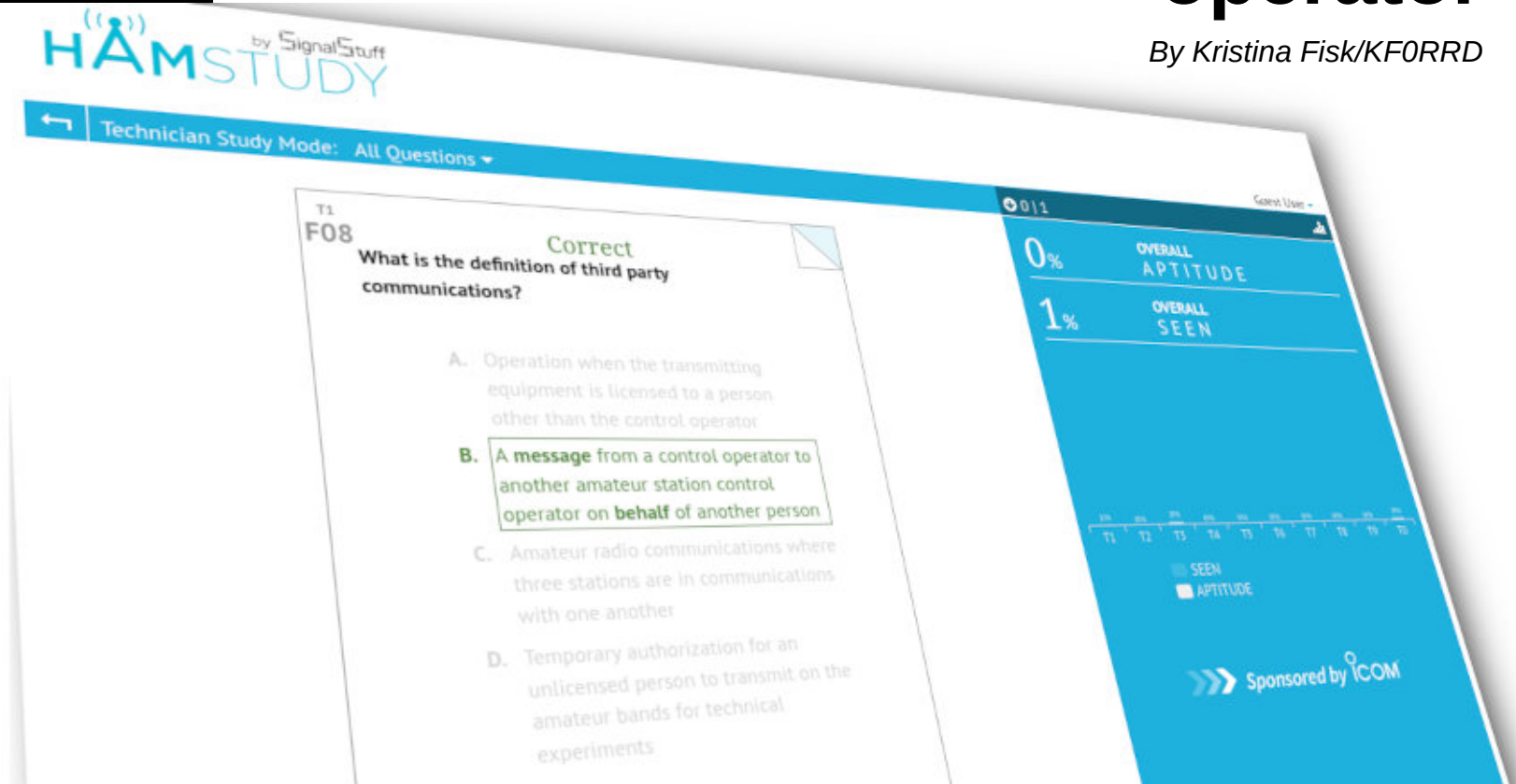


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## How I became a ham radio operator

By Kristina Fisk/KF0RRD



When I married my husband five years ago, he was a technician ham radio operator and he rarely did anything with it. However, he made sure to keep his license up to date.

Fast forward five years: we recently moved to Colorado from Virginia. I have lived in the Springs on and off through the years and we needed to be in a place where we could make more money. My husband joined PPRAA over the summer, and was helping set up for the Megafest one night. I was never really interested in getting licensed; in fact I told him he could have his hobby! However, I went to dinner with quite a few ham radio operators that night. They strongly and not-so-discreetly asked if I would be interested in taking the test the next day. I laughed them off and said, "maybe when I study more." I have dyslexia and it's hard for me to test. They said I should try anyway. So was born the idea that I become a ham.

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### How I became, cont.

I studied that night and the next morning I went to the Megafest. At the hamfest, I went to go to the testing area. I didn't think I would pass but wanted to see what the test was like. I was sitting there waiting for the test with my strong test anxiety, and in walks Jon. Someone else wasn't sure that they were going to pass and he said, "well, if you're not getting 80% or higher while studying," he said to this other lady, "I would not try until you are." I walked away crying because I knew I would not pass but I needed to know what I was studying for and what the test looked like.

I said to my husband, "there is no way I can pass." So my husband, out of wanting me to be a ham, walked up to Jon and told him that I wanted to take the test. He knew I was not going to pass but with dyslexia and test anxiety, I wanted to try. Jon and I spoke and I told him that I was going to get my license no matter what, and if I needed support, I would let him know. I took the test that day and failed, only missing 15 after studying for one day.

I proceeded to email Jon two weeks later to take the test again, this time only listening to the book on Audible, thinking that I wanted to see the difference. This time I had the test read to me. While it was not ideal, I failed, missing 14 this time. After talking to Jon, we realized that I did not have the booklet in front of me to look at. Again, with dyslexia and test anxiety, I had failed but this time I told Jon I would be back.

The next month I studied and studied, and my husband said at one point, "you are studying

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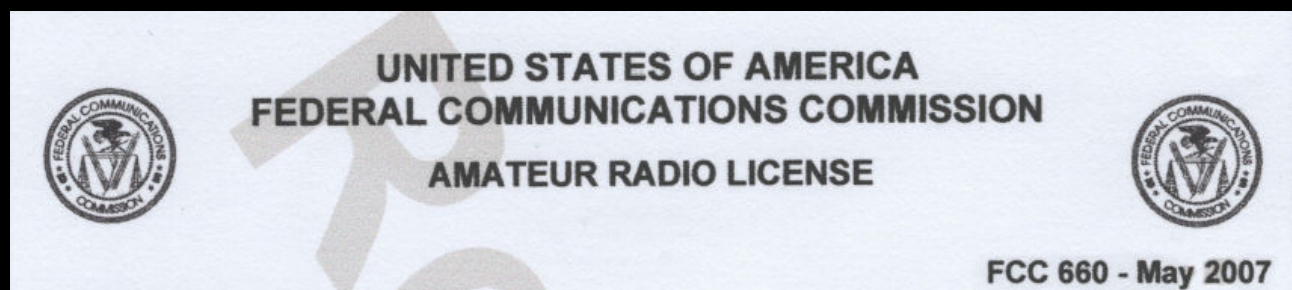
### How I became, cont.

too hard." I said, "if I don't get 90% on each one of these tests, I am not ready." He was more than frustrated.

I walked into the Office of Emergency Management on September 14th and took the technician test in a separate room with three VEs and my own personal booklet to mark in, because it was the only way I could pass. Also knowing that I was only missing 10 at this point, and not sure if I could pass, we had a plan for me to know my score so that I could retake immediately if needed.

In 20 minutes, after studying 'til I could not study any more and working hard to learn the material, I missed 9 questions. I believe Jim, one of the VEs who tested me, said something like "I think in German they say 'nein!'" I remember thinking, "in German that means 'no,' so did I pass?" and then I realized I wouldn't be getting picked on if it was no. They were telling me I had passed!

So the thought that this test is easy is not an accurate statement. However, the thought that anyone who wants this can pass it is accurate, and sometimes a little hard work goes a long way. Also, I will be taking my general test in the same manner and hoping to pass this time, since I now know how much work goes into passing these tests for myself.





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## Upcoming events

**November 13 (Wednesday), 1900 (7:00 PM)**

The PPRAA membership meeting for November will be held **online only!** Our usual meeting place will be closed temporarily for improvements, so we will meet online by Zoom instead. Please watch your email inbox for the Zoom link to participate.

**PPRAA Club Christmas Party**

**December 11 (Wednesday)**

The PPRAA Christmas party will be celebrated in lieu of our monthly membership meeting in December. It will be at Edelweiss Restaurant, and RSVP/reservation is required. Email [xmas@ppraa.org](mailto:xmas@ppraa.org) for details and to reserve your seat.

**Winter Field Day 2025**

**January 25, 1000 (10:00 AM) - January 26, 1559 (3:59 PM)**

PPRAA will participate in Winter Field Day 2025 at Cheyenne Mountain State Park, in the Raptor Glen campground. Note the new extended hours for 2025. If you would like to camp, reserve your space near sites 9 and 10, where the ham radio stations will be.



## Contact Zero Beat

Do you have photos of PPRAA events you'd like to share, or news from the ham radio world that the club might like to hear? Please email [zerobeat@ppraa.org](mailto:zerobeat@ppraa.org) to share your ideas and pictures.